

## **SOCIAL ETHICS AND RELIGIOUS ETHICS - SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE**

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In recent years, the process of social and economic development following market mechanism and the process of industrialization, modernization and urbanization have lessened the moral values. The individualism, pragmatism, and social evils seem to develop. The struggle against the reduction of ethics is the long and hard struggle. This struggle asks us to have the concrete and practical solutions. It is important for us to build new ethics in the process of social and economic development. We should combine social benefits with collective and individual benefits harmoniously. We should overcome and check the causes that make ethics to be downgraded. Of course, building of new ethics in a market economy is not easy and simple problem. We have the suitable means to develop values of the new ethics. When building ethics that corresponds with the recent development we should distinguish the similarity and difference between social ethics and religious ethics (through the study of two great religions in Vietnam: Buddhism and Catholicism) so that we can know and use reasonable elements and overcome limited aspects of religious ethics. At present, the Vietnamese Communist Party and State have recognized that religion is the need of a part of the people, in religion there are good values of ethics and culture. The matter of religious ethics is studied by scientists. Religious dogmas have dealt with the values of human ethics. These ethics are useful in building new ethics and dignity of the Vietnamese. The great values of religious ethics contribute to maintain social ethics, to perfect individual dignity and to lead human beings to the True, the Good and the Beautiful. However, religious ethics has also negative elements because it has led human beings to unreal happiness and lost self-control and creation of human beings. Hence, we should find the similarities in religious ethics and in social ethics to promote the good values of religion and to overcome its negative elements that influence dignity of the Vietnamese at present.

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First of all, we should understand that ethics is standard that is recognized society. It has regulated human behaviors and relations towards society. Ethics is the good quality of human beings by training and cultivation<sup>(1)</sup>. On philosophic aspect, ethics is one of the earliest forms of social sense including social standards that corrects human behaviors in the connection with others and the community (family, villages, classes, nation and society). Basing on these standards we can assess human behaviors in accordance with conceptions of the good, on the evil and we can find what is considered to be unethical. The moral standards are not defined clearly as legal rules but these moral standards are recognized and carried out by all people<sup>(2)</sup>. Because of social needs, ethics has been born and developed. It has regulated the individual relation and human actions at all levels of social life. The moral characters have manifested the social nature of human beings. The moral characters are special features of human beings. The advance of the moral sense is an integral part in the general advance of society.

A moral society has been a historical phenomenon, in fact, moral society reflects social relations. When criticizing moral theory of Duyrinh, F. Engels wrote that “*All former moral theories are the product, in the last analysis, of the economic stage*”. If society has a class, its ethics will have a feature of the class. Each class has its own morality so that there are moralities of primitive society, of slavery regime, of feudal regime, of the bourgeois class and of the communist system. These moralities reflect the practical relations that lay groundwork for the roles of classes. In society there are many classes, the moral thought of the ruling class will be main moral thought. The ruling class bases on State to propagandize and institutionalize its moral thought then turned its moral thought into the moral standard to correct individual behavior in accordance with its benefit. Because of its benefit, ruling class tries to maintain and strengthen contemporary social relation. On the contrary, ruled class struggles against the morality of the ruling class and puts forward its own moral concept. According to F. Engles “*No ethics system possesses absolute truth or finality*”. However, F. Engles never negated the values of moral theories toward social development. He thought that ethics as well as branches of human knowledge have progressed. And “*The current ethics has represented the revolt against this domination and it has represented the*

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<sup>1</sup> The Institute of Linguistics, *Vietnamese Dictionary*, Đà Nẵng Publisher, Vietnam Lexicography Centre, 2004, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup> Lê Bách, *Ethics*, Educational Publishing House, Hanoi, 2002.

*future interests. It has been proletarian ethics. This ethic has many factors that can exist in long time*’.

Society has classes, its ethics has features of the class but its ethics has also heritable characters. Economic and social complexion can change but condition of activities and the form of common communities can remain unchanged. The moral heritability reflects “*simple and basic rules of any communities*” (V. I. Lenin). All moral demands relate to the simplest relations of human beings. All ages condemn cruelty, savageness, cowardice and praise the good, bravery, modesty, charity □ “*Nobody doubted of advance of ethics and of other branches of human knowledge*” (F. Engels). Human relations are more and more humane. In primitive society, human beings knew how to help each other and they did not have anthropophagy. When alliances of tribes and states came into the world, the revenging customs of tribes gradually disappeared. In slaveholding society, slave holder could kill his slave but this action was condemned in feudal society. The feudal morality stifled individualities under the power of religions and aristocrats; the bourgeois morality liberated individual and respected individuality. “*But we cannot overcome the framework of class morality. A humanitarian morality that overcomes class opposition and all the memories of the opposition can only be achieved when people not only win but also forget class opposition*” (F. Engels). That is the future society, communist society.

The advance of morality is established by the moral values in its developmental history. In moral theologies, some theologies impulse social advance in certain moments but some moral theologies have long values for social developments.

In current trend, along with the changes of economy and society, awareness of religion is innovated. In the past, we considered religions as to be “remnant” of the old society and wrong awareness. At present, Vietnamese Party and State have an objective judgment on religions. The Vietnamese Communist Party and State have recognized that religions will be existed long and they have some moral values in accordance with the values of all people and with the cause of social building. Therefore, we need to promote the good cultural and moral values of religions. This has an important significance to define religious policies, to preserve cultural and religious heritages. Learning about the similarities and differences of social morality and religious morality has an important significance in the current renovation period when we need to promote all forces to take part in the cause of building our country. We need to

strengthen the united bloc of all nations and promote the cultural and moral values of religions in building new morality and the culture deeply imbued with its national identity.

When studying the religious ethics, we can find that there are many different opinions on religious ethics. Some opinions think that in religious ethics there are not positive and progressive elements. Religious morality is contrary to the world ethics and it cannot apply to real life. Other opinions think that religion has not its own morality. Religious morality is borrowing of human morality and each religion can stress on this problem or other problems. We need to start from following theoretical points to affirm whether religious morality exists or not.

The first, *we need to start from a theoretical point of historical materialism on social sense, especially the mutual effect of forms of social sense in the process of reflecting social existence.* Historical materialism points out principle of social existence and it shows that social sense has its own relative independent character. In the developmental process, the forms of social sense have exchanges, inheritance and the influence of each other. Religious sense never separates from morality, politics, law and aesthetics. The mutual impacts and influences of religious sense and other senses have created plentifulness of each form of social sense. In a religious sense, there are elements of thought, of culture, of aesthetics, of politics and of parties. Religion can not exist and developments in the histories of nations in the world if its nature has only wrong, illusional and negative elements. In *Discovery of India*, J. Nehru wrote that “*Yet it was obvious that religion had supplied some deeply felt inner need of human nature, and that the vast majority of people all over the world could not do without some form of religious belief. It had given a set of values for human life, and though some of these values had no application today, or were even harmful, others were still the foundation of morality and ethics*” So we can say that in the process of reflecting social existence, the form of religious sense and the form of moral sense always have a mutual relation, they can infiltrate into each other. The dialectic effect is happening in the condition of social activities and in religion there are moral matters.

Religion and morality are elements to constitute superstructure and they reflect social existence by different ways. Religion reflects unreal reality. Morality reflects the human relation with society. This is the real relation.

The second, *when considering religion as the form of independent social sense, we find that religion consists of moral contents (including value,*

*standard, ideal morality), they show in religious dogmas.* Any religion has the standard system and moral values to correct the sense and moral acts of believers. Almost religions declare the supreme values of supernatural force (God, Jehovah, Saints and Buddha). In fact, the moral conception of all religions deals with moral standards such as gratefulness, honesty, charity. In *Science and Religion*, Bertrand Russell thought that the large religion has its systems of dogma, of morality and of church. Believers have to obey moral rule in accordance with their religious dogmas. So some moral contents become parts of religious ethics. For example, the main problems of Buddhism are “to escape from suffering” and to attain to Nirvana. Any one who wants to attain Nirvana not only needs religious belief but also carries out a moral life. Since then Buddhism puts forth concrete moral standards for people to practise and strive. Buddhism deals with *Panca silani* - five commandments (against murder, theft, lust, lying and drunkenness) and *sa - daśakuśalakarmāni* - ten good deeds (Not to kill, to steal, to fornicate, to lie, to polish your words for personal advantages, to use harsh speech, to crave; to be angry; to be ignorant (stupid) or wrong views). These standards are behavioral standards of people and useful for society. For Christian morality, admonition advises people to love God firstly. Bible advises believers to love their parents, their wives, their husbands, their children, their brothers and sisters, their villages. Bible advises believers not to kill, to lie, to steal. The moral standards of religions guide people to do good things. We can find that religions deal with moral matters in the life. The moral values and standards of religions have certain significances in upholding social morality. Therefore, we can define that “beside *advices having religious contents* there are *advices without religious contents in the system of religious values. These advices manifest the world relation*”.

The third, *according to Marxist - Leninist view, we can affirm that classics dealt with religious morality when they discussed religions. They not only criticized negative problems of religions but also showed the active significances of religious morality.* When being born, almost religions have reflected the thirst for liberty and equality of work-people. K. Marx affirmed that “*Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress*”. Human beings powerlessly find their happiness in the world so they have to look for happiness in Paradise. Religion makes human beings to believe in the help of deities. F. Engels studied history of religions especially Catholic history and he proved that the appearance of Catholicism is a reaction against injustice and cruelty of slavery. Similarly,

Primitive Buddhism was the thirst of people who resisted class division in Indian ancient society. Catholicism calls upon people to love each other. Buddhism has advocated compassion we can find active features of other religions when they build love relations between people with people and guide people to do good things. We have to recognize that K. Marx, F. Engels and V. I. Lenin did not deeply deal with the above matters because they spent much time to study the main matters of revolution. These problems connected closely with the cause of liberation for Proletarian class and work people in the world.

When analyzing and appreciating the social role of religions, Marxist - Leninist founders often based on the standpoints of dialectical materialism and of historical materialism. V. I. Lenin often dealt with negative impacts of religions and of church, for example reactionaries took advantage of religions to defend exploiters. The notable feature in Marxist - Leninist theory on religion was that religion connected with the class struggle in Europe and it served actively revolutionary demands of Proletarian class. Because of the condition, they dealt more with the negative aspects of religions. They had not condition to study deeply culture, morality, sentiment, psychology of religions. However, the founders of Marxism and Leninism also dealt with that religion was the need of a part of people and of social development in certain historical periods. F. Engels wrote that *"religions are founded by people who feel a need for religion themselves and have a feeling for the religious needs of the mass of people"*. According to him the appearance of Christianity in Ancient Roman met the wish of slaves but in fact they could not be liberated. K. Marx denoted that imperfect people created the religious world; on the contrary, religions met the need of people in that world. When dealing with deities, V. I. Lenin also found that religion was the need of a part of people because his enemies tried their best to dignify the need of religion against revolution so Lenin criticized the writers who dignified "religious needs". On the policies of the Communist Party to religions, Lenin always reminded that we should not treat religions badly, we should not declare war against religions publicly; we should combine criticism of religion with mobilization of the masses and help the masses to take part in real activities in order to build "paradise in the world".

We can affirm that there are religious ethics and these ethics combines with the values of human ethics. Because of concrete historical conditions, each religion has special characters and religious morality also has some given values in social life. Religious morality is one of the factors that influence vigorously social morality. They are the similarities between religious morality

and social morality. Because religion has gone with people in history, so religion has been the cultural heritage of human beings. In the process of developing, religion not only manifests human faith but also integrates with human culture and civilization. Religion contributes to maintain social morality in the world. Religion influences the vigorous spiritual life of people. As a part of ideology, religion helps each social community, each state and each nation have a special expression in his lifestyle, in costume, in cultural elements as well as in spirit. We can find that all religions stress on benefaction so that believers acquire sentiment of religious morality. Acts of charity of humans have been religionized and they have developed vigorously.

Although religions reflect some special features and illusional world but they also contribute to control immoral actions. Many believers observe commandments of religions on morality, so they live and behave kindly towards others. Basing on faith in supernatural men such as God, Buddha, religious morality has been established so believers practice religious morality voluntarily. After all, believers carry out moral principles and standards in order to serve their faith. Religions have conviction because they have alternation between hope and fear, between reality and sacredness. In fact, many believers donate money to build pagodas. Religious morality conducts people with human values and contributes to perfect individual morality. All religions deal with love. The merciful spirit of Buddhism is not only for human beings but also for animals and plants. Buddhism advocates humanity, compassion and protection of life. Christian morality also deals with love and human love is the key problem in moral conception with love. The moral standards of Christianity help believers to perfect their morality in community relation. However, all religions deal with love, mercifulness generally. All religions want to reject injustice and social contradictions by morality. It is very hard to carry out this idea in the world although it is a good idea. However, religious morality has an active effect on moral individuality and society. Religious morality has similarities with social morality.

In short, religious morality has active features and corresponds with social morality. At present, it is necessary for us to analyze the role of religious morality to affirm its active contributions and its negative influences in social life. We hope that human values and moral standards of all religions will make values of national morality more plentiful and religious morality is useful in the cause of building a new society. /.